So a very great man once said, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”

These words swirled through my mind as I began my week walking the classrooms, hallways, and many other spaces of our school last week. I reflected on these very wise words, once spoken by the late, great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as I went searching for evidence as to whether we here at Woodbrook are doing a good job of providing a learning environment where character development is at the core of all that we do. As a young child, I was raised to accept the fact that it didn’t really matter how smart you were, if you were not able to share that knowledge and experience with the rest of the world in ways that benefited more than just yourself.

Outside of home, schools are one of the most essential and influential places to develop a young child’s character. This past Friday, I was privileged and so very honored to co-host with fourth grade teacher, Ms. Leslie Wills our 3rd annual MLK-Student Leadership Awards. This event has grown to become one of my most treasured days of the school year. I think the reason for this, is that it affirms for me the work that we are doing as educators.

Before our entire student body, staff, and school community our teachers took time to recognize and highlight a student in their class who consistently emulates through his or her daily words/actions the traits that we educators strive to develop in all of our students each and every day a child walks through the doors here at Woodbrook; the traits of kindness, compassion, cooperation, responsibility, respect, self-control, persistence and empathy – not only for ourselves, but more importantly for all those around us.

Our kids are growing up at a time where it’s easy to become desensitized to the hurt, pain, and suffering caused by others. And it seems to have become even easier to just turn and look the other way. However, I ask you to imagine how different our country and world would look, had someone like Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, or Mahatma Gandhi, just looked the other way. Or, even better if they were raised to do to others what was done to them.

One of the most important reasons I decided to become an educator was because I passionately believed that schools were the gateway to a better world. One of the greatest education reformers of all time, Horace Mann, advocated in the 1840’s that character development was AS important as academics in American classrooms and the Greek philosopher, Cicero once said, “within the character of the citizen lies the welfare of a nation.”

It is for all these reasons that we here at Woodbrook, have embraced the Responsive Classroom approach, and work daily to ensure that we create classroom learning environments that bring together social and academic learning opportunities for our students throughout their entire school day. We know that the very best learning takes place when a child lives and works in a school environment that is kind, safe, respectable, and predictable. As a staff, we continue to work together to implement some common school-wide practices: like beginning our days with a Morning Meeting, hosting monthly school-wide Morning Meetings that allow us to share this wonderful time with our friends and families, using our common CARES language so that our students learn daily what it looks and sounds like to be an individual who is cooperative, assertive, respectful, responsible, empathetic, and to practice self-control. Offering our students comfort and choice in their learning so that they feel more willing to accept challenges and to take risks.

While we still have a long way to go in building our use of common language and demonstrating common ways of doing things across the school, my visits to our classrooms and learning spaces throughout the building show that we are doing a good job building a stronger, safer, shared community allowing us to keep our focus on student learning. This progress is also reflected in days like Friday, where students were honored for working to make their classrooms and school a place...
where all people feel safe, valued and significant. When we see our students doing this, we as adults have an even higher level of accountability to ensure that we are holding ourselves and those around us to these same high standards we expect of our students.

I hope that you will take time to recognize these wonderful students if you happen to see them in the hallways of our school when you are visiting, or if you know their parents to compliment them on the fine job they are doing in raising a child who genuinely wants to make our world a better place. While only one student in each class was recognized, it was clear as I visited classrooms, that selecting this “one” child was a challenge, because I saw many of our students reflecting character that sets them on a path for success. To all of our parents, I encourage you to MAKE time to talk to your child daily about his/her day at school. Ask them to share the different ways they were helped by others, or even better how they helped to make someone else’s day better. You want affirmation in how well you are doing parenting your child, I promise you will find it in your child’s stories that are shared over time.

Thank you for all that you do to make our world a better place one child at a time!

Best,
Ms. Lisa Molinaro

It is hard to believe that we are halfway through the school year. Across all grades, we are administering a variety of assessments to our students to determine how they are progressing towards mastery of their grade-level standards. These assessments take on many different formats from one-to-one performance tasks, to computerized assessments. If you would like specific information regarding how your child is progressing please feel free to contact your child’s teacher directly. They would be more than happy to provide you with information that will help you to better support your child at home.

Woodbrook after school interest clubs and tutoring will start up the week of February 17th. We will be offering a variety of engaging topics for students to choose from, however we are still looking for additional volunteers. Do you or someone you know have a special skill or talent that you would like to share with a small group (6-8) of students who have a similar interest? We want very much to partner with our community to make our clubs more enriching for our students. If you would like to volunteer one time a week (either Tuesday or Wednesday), please contact Ms. Molinaro or Ms. Jeck at 873-6600. We would love to have you here with us!

Due to the unexpected inclement weather that closed schools for a majority of the week, we will have to reschedule our school-wide Talent Show. Originally scheduled for Friday, January 30th at 6:30 we will now be hosting this fun evening event for the family on Friday, February 7th at 6:30 pm. Students will continue to have practice on Wednesdays after school. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Rachel Cogswell at rdcogswell@embarqmail.com or Tracy Higginbottom at thehigginbottoms@comcast.net

SAVE THE DATE...The Annual PTO Woodbrook Sweetheart Dance is coming soon! We hope you will join us on February 21st for an evening of dancing and fun. It is open to students and their families.

Do you have a child, or know a child turning 5 before September 30, 2014 that lives in the Woodbrook school district? If so, mark your calendars now for Kindergarten Registration. This will take place here at the school on Wednesday, March 19th. It will take place throughout the school day and in the evening until 6:00 pm. Please feel free to call the main office for additional information at 973-6600.